



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

SOME TEXT-BOOKS ON ENGLISH LITERATURE.¹

It has been some time now since the "Committee of Ten" became a shibboleth in educational circles, and it is quite time that we looked about us to discover just what, if anything, has resulted from the labors of those who gave us the phrase, if nothing else. Undoubtedly they have given us something more. A glance at any publisher's catalogue will bring to light hundreds of text-books on almost every subject which owe their existence to a demand created by the reports of these committees. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the field of English literature where each publisher offers the forty-odd volumes of the special authors prescribed for the entrance examinations for the next four years to come, with enough others to last a period equally long, thrown in for good measure. Now supposing that there were no more than half a dozen publishers of these "series" (specimens of the work of four of them are on the writer's desk at this moment) there would still be an appalling expenditure of ink and paper—to say nothing of brains and labor—in the effort to carry out the behests of the Ten in regard to the methods of imparting a knowledge of the English language and a proper appreciation of its literature.

Just how far these text-books succeed in their purpose is a question which cannot be answered until sufficient time has elapsed to enable us to judge of their usefulness by their effects upon the students who have been advanced from the preparatory schools in which they are used to the higher work of the colleges and universities, but this much may be

¹ *Macaulay's Life of Samuel Johnson*. Edited by Huber Gray Buehler [Longmans' English Classics.]

Six Selections from Irving's Sketch Book. Edited by Homer B. Sprague; *Irvings Alhambra* edited by Alice H. White [Ginn's Classics for Children.]

Macaulay's Essays on Milton and Addison. Edited by Samuel Thurber [Allyn & Bacon.]

Dryden's Palamon and Arcite. Edited by W. F. Gregory. [Leach, Shewell, & Sanborn's Students' Series of English Classics.]

said of most of them at the outset — they offer a convenient, accessible means for acquiring some knowledge of the work of the best English writers, and even if they serve no other purpose than to bring about more and wider reading in the schools they will have marked a decided advance over previous methods of teaching English literature. For after all the way to study a literature or even a language is to read it. Mark Twain in his "Life on the Mississippi" shows us how he became a pilot — not by learning about the river but by learning the river itself. And so it is, that the school-boy will learn best how to handle his mother tongue by becoming familiar with the way the masters have handled it, not by endlessly dissecting clauses and phrases and memorizing pedantic rules and phraseology. The first step therefore in the teaching of English should be to teach the pupil to read — few boys read well — to read understandingly, appreciatively. The next is to teach him what to read, and then to show him exactly why he should read the authors put into his hands. The specimens of literature selected for the class-room must not only be models of style, but they must be worth reading and they must possess an interest for the young reader. As to the treatment these authors should receive at the hands of the respective editors, it is enough to say that it should be such as is calculated to direct the student in his reading and impart to him a method. As already indicated, the selections are well adapted and in most cases the style in which the books are presented is attractive, but the editorial work cannot be dismissed so easily. Some of these books, far too many of them in fact, are made for the same purpose as the historical razors. This purpose, however pardonable in the publisher, is a serious offense in the editor, being an affront to true scholarship and an imposition upon the public.

As an example of a book of this kind we may select the first on our list, though it is only fair to say that it is by no means representative of the series to which it belongs — a series which marks a distinct advance over most of its

rivals. The introductory note is fairly good though somewhat stereotyped, but the notes at the end of the book which are presumably for the assistance of the student betray either extreme haste or great carelessness on the part of the editor. A few examples will show this. Thus about *Lichfield* he tells us to buy a map, for *churchman* we must procure an English History, and the fact that encyclopædias are referred to about once to the page would indicate that the *Britannica* is a necessary adjunct to this edition. In fact all through these notes the editor seems to betray a desire to "unload" his editing on somebody else. Speaking of persons mentioned in the text he continually tells the inquiring student that they "should be looked up." Most of the notes are of too trifling a character to be of any importance, as when we are told that "*pledged*" means "*pawned*" when by no possibility could it mean anything else in the passage. The very next note tells us that "blue ribands" means the ribbons worn by members of the "Order of the Garter," but does not vouchsafe any information about the Order itself. There are entirely too many notes, the editor not having realized that it is a great mistake to do the work of either teacher or pupil. Notes should be few rather than many, and they should relate to such things as are not easily discoverable by the student, or are especially essential. It is much better to put into the hands of the student a note-book and pencil than a whole volume of ready-made annotations, especially if these latter are of a somewhat frivolous character. This is true because, in the first place, the true teacher does not simply "hear lessons," and, in the second place, it is debilitating for a student to be confronted with a *mélange* of trifles which would probably not do him any good if he knew them all. He should not be given net results independent of the processes which lead to them. In many cases the processes are more valuable than the results.

But passing on we find that the poorest of all the texts at hand is an edition of Irving's *Alhambra*. Here the idea

seems to have been to put the author into as hideous a binding as possible and so perhaps to induce the student to look within for sheer disgust of the exterior. There is absolutely no editing. We are told that *battlements* are "notched walls on the top of buildings," *freebooters* are "robbers," a *valet* is a "gentleman's servant," and so on. All the notes are of the above character, and the information given in them might be almost entirely obtained from a dictionary. True the series to which this edition belongs is called "Classics for children," but if the children are old enough to read such a book as the *Alhambra* they might be expected to know how to use a dictionary and most of them could prepare better editions both of the *Alhambra* and the *Sketch-book* than the ones at hand. A more tastefully bound volume than either of the above is an edition of "Palamon and Arcite" belonging to the "Students' Series of English Classics." In this the introductory matter is particularly good and exceedingly well arranged. A feature of it is estimates of Dryden by Johnson, Scott, Macaulay, and others, set down in chronological order and made the text of the editor's remarks about the poet. The notes, however, are poor, and for the most part entirely unnecessary, the editor in spite of his declaration to the contrary giving merely a sort of glossary. On the other hand the editor of the two essays of Macaulay on Milton and Addison takes it for granted, as he announces at the outset, that every school-boy has ready access to a full library and his notes teem with injunctions to "look this up" and "see" so and so. A peculiarly characteristic note is one on "Sad Electra's Poet" which he tells us "should be *searched for till found*"!

To sum up, we find that all these editions approach one or the other of two extremes. Some of them seem to indicate that the student must be assumed to know nothing at all, not even the meaning of common words or where to find them, while others take it for granted that it is not necessary to tell him anything at all. Of course the mean is the edition which attempts to guide the learner towards what is

worth learning not by seeking to do his work for him but by showing him how it is to be done. The editor of such a text directs, excites interest in the work, explains only what is obscure. A class in English is like a class in chemistry, a a coöperative society of which the teacher is president but never the janitor. It is his business to see that the work is carried on in the right way not by doing it himself but by directing how it is to be done. No boy ever yet learned to write English, or even to appreciate it, either by having been made to "look up" such characters as Cyriac Skinner or from having his mental stomach overloaded with piles of notes, biographical, historical, etymological, or what not. As we have already said, he must read the literary masterpiece itself—read it intelligently, carefully and frequently. Hence in an edition for school use there should be more introductory and prefatory matter than notes. These latter should be only such as tend to make the reading smooth and intelligible. A child brought up in the lower walks of life speaks bad English because he has been saturated with it, and so the only way to teach any child good English is to saturate him with it. This is what the Committee of Ten meant and this is what all the editions must come to.

W. H. McK.

A NEW POETIC VENTURE.

Mr. Edwin Arlington Robinson, of Gardiner, Maine has sent us a tiny volume of verse privately printed for him at the Riverside Press. He names his booklet, from its first and last poems, "The Torrent and the Night Before." There are only forty-four pages all told, but in his use of them Mr. Robinson shows that he possesses what so many poets lack—a modicum of common-sense. He utilizes his pages to the full by printing his verses straight along without wasting space by giving us what the printer calls "fat pages." This is so sensible a procedure, especially in a privately printed book, that we feel bound to commend it. We wish we could praise as heartily the independence shown